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**Office of Youth Development Creates Position of Family Ombudsman, Names Middle School Principal to Post**  
***New Position to Expand Agency's Family Focus***

BATON ROUGE, La. – The Louisiana Office of Youth Development has tapped a middle school principal for a new position aimed at increasing family involvement and success among the youth in its care.

Prince Gray will serve as OYD's family ombudsman, the primary liaison between the state agency and the youth and their families. Until earlier this month he was principal of Kenilworth Middle School in Baton Rouge. Gray will serve in a chief advisory capacity, reporting directly to the head of the agency, OYD Deputy Secretary Simon Gonsoulin. He begins his position today.

"We began months ago exploring the possibility of appointing an ombudsman within OYD. We found that, while not every state has a juvenile justice ombudsman, those that do have found it to be a 'win-win' for youth, their families and staff alike. We wanted someone with strong integrity and communication skills, but most importantly we wanted someone who knows kids, and Prince fits the bill," Gonsoulin said.

Typically, an ombudsman investigates citizen complaints and concerns and recommends remedies. The OYD family ombudsman will complement the agency's existing services, including Project Zero Tolerance, and increase direct involvement with the youth and families involved. He also will address other concerns of families and explore ways to get them more engaged.

"As we move forward in our effort to transform juvenile justice, it is more important than ever that we focus on families," Gonsoulin said. "If we are to help youth become successful, we need to be more attuned and responsive to their needs and to those of their family members. We will take those insights into account as we shape the future of our agency. We want parents and family members to know that their voices are being heard, and we want to make it easier for them to communicate with us."

Families will be able to telephone Gray toll free. He will travel around the state to meet with youth and their families and to address their concerns about issues at facilities and elsewhere in the system. He also will conduct orientation sessions to help youth and families understand the system.

"I'm looking forward to participating in the juvenile justice reform effort. I'm particularly eager to work with the youth and families OYD serves. As an educator and a father I know that when family members work together, you can achieve powerful results," Gray said.



KATHLEEN BABINEAUX BLANCO, GOVERNOR

# Office of Youth Development

Simon G. Gonsoulin, Deputy Secretary

OYD is developing orientation videos and informational pamphlets describing family involvement opportunities, educational programs, treatment services and other elements of the system that can help youth turn their lives around.

At the same time, secure facilities are opening special, "living room style" family intervention rooms that encourage family therapy in a home-style environment. The first became operational at Bridge City Center for Youth near New Orleans this month.

Gray began his career in 1995 as a special education teacher in Baton Rouge. After earning his master's degree in administration and supervision from Southern University he became an assistant principal at North Iberville Elementary and High School in Maringouin, where he supervised curriculum, instruction and discipline. He served as a middle school supervisor and Education Excellence Fund coordinator in East Baton Rouge Parish before his appointment to principal of Kenilworth Middle School in March of 2003.

The Louisiana Office of Youth Development serves about 5,000 youth in community-based programs, parole and probation programs and at secure care facilities including Bridge City Center for Youth, Jetson Center for Youth near Baton Rouge and Swanson Center for Youth in Monroe.

Louisiana's juvenile justice system is in the midst of a reform. The effort gained momentum two years ago when the Legislature passed the Juvenile Justice Reform Act of 2003. Last year, in one of her first actions as governor, Governor Kathleen Babineaux Blanco made juvenile justice reform a top priority of her administration by ordering the separation of the Office of Youth Development from the Department of Public Safety and Corrections. This change underscored the new emphasis of juvenile justice in Louisiana from corrections to one centered on the treatment and rehabilitation of youth.

The state partnered with the Annie E. Casey Foundation and Mark Steward, the director of Missouri's Department of Youth Services, to develop and implement strategies for reforming secure care facilities and transitioning to more community-based services that keep young people closer to home. In addition to redesigning facilities and youth programs, the reform includes recruiting and training Youth Care Workers and adopting a more family-centered approach.

This summer, OYD is kicking off the first phase of its regional pilot in the New Orleans area with the opening of a new dormitory at Bridge City and holding regional meetings to gather input on its strategic reform plan. The agency will release its five-year strategic plan for juvenile justice reform this fall.

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